

THE COLOR LINE REVISITED: IS RACISM DEAD?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2001, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Madam Speaker, it is my honor to begin the Congressional Black Caucus 2002 Black History Month Special Order. The theme of this year's national African American History Month is "The Color Line Revisited: Is racism dead?"

More than 100 years ago, in 1900, the great scholar, W.E.B. DuBois, addressed a pan-African conference in London where he said, "The problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line." It is now the 21st century and a major problem for this Nation is still the color line, but I believe that the color line is shifting, and shifting toward a better future.

Certainly as a nation we could not have watched Vonetta Flowers become the first African American woman ever to win a gold medal in the Winter Olympics, ironically during Black History Month, without acknowledging that the color line is shifting.

Certainly when we look at the progress among black-elected officials, we know the color line is shifting. In 1964, there were just three African Americans in Congress and 300 black-elected officials nationally. Today, those numbers have swelled to 9,000 black-elected officials nationwide and 39 Members in Congress, 38 being members of the Congressional Black Caucus.

Yes, the color line is shifting; but the problem is still here. In our lifetime, in my lifetime, I have seen Nazism fall, Communism fall, Fascism fall, but why not racism? In our lifetime, we must cling to the belief that we as a united people will celebrate the death of racism.

American-styled racism, loosely defined, is the belief that one race is superior to another. Upon this principle, slavery, Jim Crowism, lynching, economic exploitation, and many other forms of oppression were engraved in law and tradition.

Can we now say racism is dead when 51 percent of African American children are living in poverty, while the civil rights movement fought for the right to vote in the sixties; and now in the new millennium we must fight to ensure that votes are counted, particularly in black areas?

For example, one in 11 ballots in the predominantly black voting precincts in Florida were tossed out, according to a New York Times analysis of the Sunshine State's black vote.

Racial profiling is alive. About 73 percent of motorists stopped and searched on a major New Jersey highway in 1999 were African Americans, even though African Americans made up less than 18 percent of the traffic violators.

Disparities in sentencing and in incarceration have grown. African American men comprise 50 percent of the U.S. prison population, despite representing just 6 percent of the U.S. population.

Reparations were refused to the survivors of the 1921 race riots in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The legislature refused this remedy, even though whites destroyed an African American community, killing 300 residents and destroying businesses and homes.

But they are just a few examples, just a few. There are so many more.

Moreover, when we witness the fights against affirmative action as a tool against African Americans achieving equality in employment and education, we can only conclude that much more must be done to bury racism.

When we review even now that land has been taken from African Americans, that they have had to pay more for life insurance policies, we know that racism is not dead.

But in my closing, the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., speaking in Nashville, Tennessee, on December 27, 1962, are appropriate: "The problem of race and color prejudice remains America's greatest moral dilemma. How we deal with this crucial situation will determine our moral health as individuals, our political health as a Nation, and our prestige as a leader of the free world. The hour is late, the clock of destiny is ticking out. We must act now before it is too late."

I know the Speaker joins me in recognizing the tremendous achievements that African Americans are making to this Nation. When I get on an elevator to come up each day, I know that it was an African American who invented the elevator. Even turning on a light or stopping at a street light, we know that we have been part of it. Standing in this building, we know that African Americans as slave workers built this great Capitol of the Nation.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) to moderate the rest of the Special Order.

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Ms. LEE. Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON), for her leadership on issues affecting African Americans, all minorities in this country, in fact, the entire country, for everyone and for bringing us together here tonight.

As she reminded us so eloquently, in 1903 W.E.B. DuBois wrote *The Souls of Black Folks* and stated that, "the problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line."

Now here in the 21st century, nearly 100 years after the publishing of his groundbreaking work, we really do face many of the same problems, and they are further complicated by an economic divide.

While African Americans have made great strides in many areas in the last

100 years, including the end of Jim Crow and legalized segregation, the color line is still evident and is still costly to African Americans and really to the entire Nation.

Some feel that because legal segregation was ended and that the Civil Rights Act was passed and affirmative action exists in some States, some believe that racism has ended. But I ask you tonight to consider the unfortunate new manifestations of racism as they exist in the year 2002 when we ask the question, is racism dead?

There are more than 44 million people in this country without health insurance. Nearly 20 percent of African Americans have no health insurance.

Thirty percent of children living in poverty are African American. That is about 3.5 million children.

Forty percent of black men in urban areas do not graduate from high school.

There are more young African American men under the control of the criminal justice system than enrolled in higher education.

The unemployment rate for blacks is 12.2 percent compared with 5.5 percent for white.

Homicide is the leading cause of deaths for black males between 15 and 24, and suicide is the third leading cause of death among young black males.

Black men in inner-city neighborhoods are less likely to reach the age of 65 than men in Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries in the world.

Since December of 2000, over 130,000 AIDS cases were reported among women in the United States. Almost two-thirds of all women with AIDS are African Americans. And young girls make up about 58 percent of new AIDS cases among teens in the United States.

Blacks are 10 times more likely to be diagnosed with AIDS than whites and 10 times more likely to die from this disease.

African Americans in this country were emancipated from slavery and given no compensation for their forced labor nor for that of their ancestors. Following this, legalized and institutional segregation marginalized African Americans to separate and unequal education, health services and protections under the law.

This was the inequality that Dr. DuBois was speaking of in 1903, but these inequalities continued to exist and define the state of affairs for much of black America.

Is racism dead? I do not think so. African Americans are still dealing with this terrible legacy of slavery, racism, social and political and economic marginalization.

Until we erase the health disparities, education disparities, unequal economic opportunities, and ensure that there are equal protections under the law, including making sure, may I say, that the votes of African Americans are as likely to be counted as whites in

our elections, we have to acknowledge, we have to be clear about this, that the color line does exist and that there is much to do in terms of seeking liberty and justice for African Americans.

So the question now should be, what does this Congress and this administration have the will to do about this? We all have a duty, a responsibility to fight for equality and justice.

As Dr. W.E.B. DuBois reminded us so eloquently 100 years ago, he said, "By every civilized and peaceful method we must strive for the rights that the world accords to men and women clinging unwaiveringly to those great words which the sons of the fathers would feign forget, 'We hold those truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.'"

Again, I want to thank the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON) for bringing us together tonight. As we celebrate Black History Month, as it comes to a close, let us celebrate our achievements but remain vigilant on the issues that affect the millions of African Americans in this country.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Madam Speaker, I would like to yield back my time and request that time be yielded to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE).

IS RACISM ALIVE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. BIGGERT). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2001, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) is recognized for the remainder of the minority leadership hour.

Ms. LEE. Madam Speaker, I would like to recognize the gentlewoman from Florida (Mrs. MEEK), a great African American shero.

Mrs. MEEK of Florida. Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague.

Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to stand here today to celebrate black history, American history. The theme of this month or week and this special order is *The Color Line Revisited: Is Racism Dead?*

Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON), and I also want to thank the Congressional Black Caucus for organizing today's black history special order.

Certainly the history of the people of African descent is interwoven with the history of America. Since the first Africans arrived on what is now American soil in 1619, black Americans have played a pivotal role on behalf of the development of this great Nation. I rise to speak on behalf of this year's Black History Month as designated by the Association of the Study of African American Life in History. For me, every month is Black History Month.

The Color Line Revisited: Is Racism Dead? This poignant theme forces us to

reflect upon the legacy of African Americans and the state of race relations in America. To some people, race relations is a term that they feel a little bit shy to talk about or to think about. But we must still remember that race is a great divider in our great country, and we must talk about it.

We have much to celebrate in the achievements of African Americans and the great strides this country has made towards equality. Just recently, we saw Vonetta Flowers make history by becoming the first African American ever to win a gold medal in the winter Olympics.

We have had many, many firsts, but our many firsts should have been firsts many, many years ago. The fact that I am able to serve as a Member of Congress along with 38 other African Americans is a clear indication of how far we have come. In the State of Florida it took three of us 129 years to come to this Congress. My question is, was racism alive? Would we have been here 129 years earlier?

America has changed much since I was a child growing up in Tallahassee, Florida, which at one time was really the seat of racism in the South. We no longer accept legal discrimination. We no longer allow poll taxes to bar African Americans from voting. We no longer accept separate but equal schools or water fountains. We are no longer forced to sit in the back of bus.

But we do often sit in the back of the bus many times, maybe not in a real bus but in the bus that is America, many times we sit in the back seat. We are not happy about it. We fight every day to be sure that the people we represent and those who are not here in the halls of Congress as we are to say we must fight anything that stands in our way to keep us from equality.

We are very proud, but there is much work to be done. We have come a very long way since the slave ships arrived on these shores. However, there is still a lot to be done.

This theme makes us ask the difficult question, is racism really dead? This is an important question that has the capacity to make us feel a little uncomfortable. We would rather not have to answer this question.

However, is racism dead when the black unemployment rate remains twice that of whites? Is racism dead when a young married couple is denied financing on the house of their dreams simply because of their skin color? Is a racism dead when a young black man is stopped for no apparent reason except for driving while black? Is racism dead when in my congressional district one out of six African Americans lack access to health insurance? Is racism dead when most young men who are fleeing from the police are shot in the back and it does not happen with any other color? When police use unjustified force against people of color, is racism dead?

If racism were truly dead, we would not need a Federal Office of Civil

Rights. We would not need the Fair Housing Act. We would not need the Community Reinvestment Act. We would not need countless other Federal and State offices whose job is to monitor and enforce equal treatment.

These are just some of today's challenges for African Americans and for America and for this Congress.

We need to continue to help America understand these challenges and struggles shall serve as incentives for a new program of action. We must work very hard to eradicate the institutional racism that exists in many of America's institutions, America schools, America's churches. All institutions in America frequently have racism.

Let us work hard to fund educational reform at a level that will impact the schools that need it most. Let us work hard to make health care available and affordable for African Americans and for all Americans. Let us speak out and demand justice in the face of unjustified use of force by police in our communities.

Our goal, as it was for the civil rights movement in the 1960s, should be an end to inequality in America. As we celebrate black history during this special month of February, let us realize that black history is American history. Let us commend ourselves as Americans, as African Americans to work ceaselessly to end the persistent inequalities in our Nation and improve the quality of life for all Americans, the challenge to keep what we have and a god to glorify.

Ms. LEE. Madam Speaker, I want to thank the gentlewoman from Florida (Mrs. MEEK) for that very eloquent statement and also for actually working every day of your life to make the American dream real for all.

I would like to now recognize my colleague, the gentlewoman from Georgia (Ms. MCKINNEY), a fighter for justice and human rights both here at home and abroad.

Ms. MCKINNEY. Madam Speaker, I just want to state publicly for the record that you are a tremendous woman, a woman of courage and a woman I admire.

"The black man has no rights which the white man is bound to respect." That is what the Supreme Court wrote in black and white in 1857. In the presidential election year 2000, when the Supreme Court selected George Bush as our President and failed to order that the votes of black voters be counted, did the Supreme Court resurrect the ghost of Judge Taney who wrote those words? "The black man has no rights which the white man is bound to respect."

Certainly in Florida black voters had no rights that Jeb Bush and Katherine Harris felt bound to respect. They conspired with their leader, presidential candidate and Texas Governor George W. Bush to create a list, a so-called felons' list in order to target black people and keep them from voting. They came up with a list of 57,700 names from